

Odd Fellows Hall
(Chamblee Building)
NW corner of Sycamore and Summitt Streets
Gainesville
Hall County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-1168

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. GA-1168

ODD FELLOW'S HALL
(Chamblee Building)

Location: Northwest corner of Sycamore and Summitt Streets,
Gainesville, Hall County, Georgia.

USGS Gainesville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.240580.3798360.

Present Owner: Federal Highway Administration (1976).

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Present Use: Vacant, to be demolished for the widening of State
Route 11.

Significance: The Odd Fellows Hall, built 1914, represents the
achievements of Gainesville's black community.
Designed by James Dawson O'Kelley, a black architect,
the building was constructed with funds donated by
statewide contributions from lodge members.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Odd Fellows Hall was completed in May 1914, and dedicated on June 8, 1914.
2. Architect: James Dawson O'Kelley was the architect and contractor.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The land was bought by the Union Jarrah Lodge Number 2603 from Mr. Fletcher M. Johnson in April, 1894 for \$300. A structure was subsequently built which burned on December 12, 1913. The current structure was built in 1914. In February, 1933 the building was deeded to the Union Jarrah Benevolent Association. They eventually transferred the property to the Chamblee family, who owned it until the Federal Highway Administration took over.

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4. Original plans and construction: The structure was completed at a cost of \$5000; the funds were raised by statewide contributions from lodge members. Mr. R.A. Chamblee was chairman of the building committee.
5. Alterations and additions: A mural has recently been added to the east elevation.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. Union Jarrah Lodge Number 2603: The Gainesville Lodge was a part of the Georgia Jurisdiction, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows of America, the black counterpart of the white International Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.). The Georgia Jurisdiction had their district Grand Lodge in Atlanta on Auburn Avenue (dedicated 1913). The state organization also was the headquarters for their national journal, the weekly Atlanta Independent. The editor of this publication and one of the key figures in the Odd Fellows organization was Benjamin Jefferson Davis. The Gainesville Lodge was composed of 75 members. This was an important percentage of the county's black male adult population (the 1910 black population of Hall County included 1,946 males, 867 of which were of voting age). The dedication of the new structure was on June 8, 1914. A special train brought members from Atlanta for the day. Plans were for speeches, and two softball games, with 25,000 people expected for the day.

Before the fire the Gainesville Lodge was used for a variety of purposes. Groups who used its facilities included: The Households of Ruth, Knights of Pythia, Courts of Calanthe, Masons, and Ladies Courts, who held their meetings on the second floor. The lower level was used for a funeral parlor, barbershop, and an insurance company. The new lodge had the same uses with the addition in August, 1914 of Dr. N.A. Doyle who ran a drug company with a soda fountain.

2. James Dawson O'Kelley: James Dawson O'Kelley was born around 1879 in Flowery Branch, Hall County, Georgia. O'Kelley had little, if any, formal schooling, and none in architecture.

O'Kelley built the Odd Fellows Hall in 1914 and was referred to as contractor, builder, and architect. The announcement of the completion of the structure in five months won him great praise from the May 30, 1914 Atlanta Independent (page 8): "He deserves no little commendation for this striking

example of his native genius and talent, for certainly no man could have designed, planned, and constructed such a building without great native ability." In 1916 he constructed a home for his son on Summitt Street near one he had built for himself. These were the first black-owned homes on this street which bordered close to Spring Street, the white neighborhood. It is not known whether or not these buildings are still standing.

The O'Kelley family moved to Atlanta around 1929-1931. In 1932 O'Kelley is said to have constructed a building in Stone Mountain, which is remembered as having been built for recreational purposes. This may have been one of the Federally funded projects of the era, such as the Stone Mountain Auditorium (1936). While he was in Atlanta O'Kelley was engaged in the shoe repair business which he continued in until his death in Tampa, Florida, in 1953.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Book 1, Hall County, Georgia Superior Court, 1893-1898.

Deed Book 63, Hall County, Georgia Superior Court.

Thomas, Jr., Kenneth H. The Odd Fellows Hall (The Chamblee Building). Atlanta: Historic Preservation Section, Department of Natural Resources, June, 1976.

U.S. Census: Hall County, Georgia Volume II, 1910.

Interviews with Mrs. Mattie Moon of Gainesville, Georgia; Mrs. Lottie Clemons of Indianapolis, Indiana; and Mrs. Ruth Ellison of Atlanta, Georgia in June 1976.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Gainesville News Briefs." Independent (Atlanta), August 22, 1914, 8:2.

"Grand Excursion to Gainesville." Independent (Atlanta), August 22, 1914, 8:2.

"A Trip to Gainesville." Independent (Atlanta), May 23, 1914, 4:2.

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"An Appeal for Help." Independent (Atlanta), January 17,
1914, 2:4.

Independent (Atlanta), March 22, 1913, 1:1 (dedication of
Atlanta Odd Fellows Hall).

Independent (Atlanta), January 3, 1914, 2:4.

Independent (Atlanta), May 30, 1914, Page 8 (includes photos
of O'Kelley and Gainesville Lodge).

"New Face for an Old Site." Times (Gainesville, Georgia)
December 22, 1974, 1-C.

"Odd Fellows hall at Gainesville Destroyed by Fire."
Independent (Atlanta), January 3, 1914, 2:4.

Prepared by Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr.
Historic Preservation Section
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Odd Fellows Hall is a rectangular, twelve-bay front, two story structure, constructed of brick. The regularly placed, segmental arched openings allowed multiple and changing functions to be housed in one building. There are five doorways on the first floor of the south (front) elevation, generally flanked by windows, except for the second from the corner (which is flanked on one side by a door). The second story windows are double hung sash, two over two lights. There is a stepped brick cornice. A mural has been added to the east elevation. Before this occurred one could see the glazed or pigmented headers (an unusual treatment for Georgia buildings of this date) which provided a striking pattern to this end of the structure. The interior is composed of shops on the first floor, and a large assembly hall on the second.

Prepared by Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr.
Historic Preservation Section
Department of Natural Resources
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the widening of State Route 11. John A. Burns, AIA was the HABS project coordinator. The written data was prepared by Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr. of the Historic Preservation Section, Department of Natural Resources, State of Georgia, in June 1976. The data was edited in the HABS office by Mary Beth Betts in June 1979. Photographs were taken in August, 1976 by David Kaminsky.